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*The Blessedness of dying in the Lord.*

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A

# SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

**Parish Church of Ledbury, Herefordshire,**

ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 6, 1797,

AFTER THE FUNERAL OF

MR. JOHN VAUGHAN, SENIOR,  
OF LONDON.

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BY THE

REV. WILLIAM JARVIS ABDY, A. M.

CURATE OF ST. JOHN'S HORSLEYDOWN, SOUTHWARK,  
AND

SUNDAY EVENING LECTURER OF ST. MARY LE BOW,  
CHEAPSIDE.

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We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power  
may be of God, and not of us. 2 Cor. iv. 7.

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PRICE SIXPENCE.

*THIS Discourse is respectfully dedicated to the Inhabitants of Ledbury, in the County of Hereford, and especially to those who were present at the delivery of it in their Parish Church, after the Interment of the late*

MR. JOHN VAUGHAN, SENIOR.

*It was preached, and is now published at the request of the deceased, only with a few alterations, particularly at the beginning of it, which seemed necessary to render the words of the text more fixed and determinate in their sense and application.*

*The Author is thoroughly sensible that, independent of the great and important truths which it contains, and the benevolent design of his Friend in directing its publication, there is nothing in the Discourse that can recommend it to public notice: But should any, from a regard to those truths, or from a personal respect for the deceased, think it worthy of their perusal, he is not without hope, but that through the grace of that Lord, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, they may be led to give the things, which are contained in it, a closer examination, and thereby add to the satisfaction which the Author feels, and heighten the obligation he considers himself under both to the Minister and Congregation at Ledbury, for their kind and patient attention when the Discourse was delivered.*

St. John's Horsleydown, Southwark,  
Sept. 21, 1797.

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A

# SERMON.

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REVELATIONS, CHAP. XIV. VER. 13.

AND I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN, SAYING UNTO ME, WRITE, BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD, FROM HENCEFORTH: YEA, SAITH THE SPIRIT, THAT THEY MAY REST FROM THEIR LABOURS, AND THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM.

WE have this morning heard these words pronounced over the remains of one, to whom, I trust, they were strictly applicable, and by whose desire I stand here to address you on the important subject to which they immediately relate, and in which you are all most nearly interested.

Death is, indeed, a very common subject, and the frequency of these occasions, which brings the subject before us, tends, it is to be feared, through our sad inattention and insensibility, to take off much of the solemnity of it, and causes us to attend a funeral with very different feelings to those which might be excited, were we to see a coffin, and a grave, and hear the tolling of the bell, only once in a year, or but once during our whole lives. But surely this is an evi-

dence of our depravity, and shews the undue influence which the present world has over us, that we can be so unmindful of that eternal state for which we are all destined; and so averse to a serious and frequent consideration of that change which we must soon experience, and which will prove, in its consequences, so infinitely and unspeakably important.

To correct this fatal unconcern and indifference, and to direct you how to consider your latter end, was, I am persuaded, the grand motive which urged my late respected friend to request that you might, on the occasion of his funeral, be addressed on those words of the divine Apostle, which I have just read to you; words full of emphasis, full of meaning, expressive of the Christian's state and character, his blessedness in death, and his exceeding great reward afterwards; words which are often sounding in our ears, but which, I pray God, we may now be enabled to pay such an attention to, as shall, by his grace, powerfully affect our hearts, and form us to that temper and conduct, which is necessary to our present peace, and our eternal salvation. "I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

We will, in the first place, consider the occasion of the words; secondly, we will enquire into the state and character of the persons to whom they relate—the dead which die in the Lord; and, thirdly, we will shew the nature of that blessedness which is pronounced on them.

As



As to the occasion of these beautiful and sublime words, we must refer you to the foregoing parts of the chapter, by which we learn that, after the establishment of the Christian church, and the spread of the everlasting Gospel throughout the world, the destruction of mystic Babylon should take place, and all those dreadful judgments alight upon the heads of the worshippers of the beast which had been before predicted and threatened against them: "If any man worship the  
 "beast and his image, and receive his mark in his  
 "forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the  
 "wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out with-  
 "out mixture, into the cup of his indignation; and he  
 "shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, in the  
 "presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of  
 "the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth  
 "up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor  
 "night, who worship the beast and his image, and who-  
 "soever receiveth the mark of his name." Rev. xiv.  
 ver. 9, 10, 11.

But till this prediction is fully accomplished, the outward state of things in the Christian church will always be so hostile to the truly godly, as to afford a sufficient opportunity for the display of all the suffering graces in the servants of God: And hence says the Apostle, ver. 12.  
 "Here is the patience of the saints;" here are they, or as Doddridge paraphrases it, 'Here are the triumphs of  
 'those who keep the commandments of God, and the  
 'faith of Jesus, and are determined to maintain the  
 'purity of the gospel amidst these formidable efforts  
 'to corrupt it.' Now for the encouragement of such noble and heroic characters, the words of our text appear

pear to be introduced: They were frequently called to resist even unto blood, striving against sin; and as the apprehension of a violent death could not but be more or less terrifying, even to the most courageous believers, it pleased God, in this signal manner, to pronounce them blessed: "I heard," says the divine Apostle, "a voice from heaven, saying unto me, "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, "from henceforth."—So that to die in the Lord is supposed, by some Commentators, to mean chiefly to die for the Lord, as the word is often used, or to die in the Lord's cause; not merely as professors, but as martyrs for the Christian faith.—That which this celestial voice proclaimed, and which St. John heard, he is commanded to write, that it might be of standing use and benefit to the church of God, in every future age, under the influence of that Spirit, who on this memorable occasion, confirms the delightful information respecting the blessedness of dying believers, and adds his testimony to this voice from heaven: "Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their "labours, and their works do follow them."

Our text might primarily respect the martyrs in the early ages of Christianity; but it is not to be confined to them, as there is a dying in Christ, where there is not in a way of martyrdom, a dying for him; and it is evidently to this that the blessedness is annexed.—It is, indeed, uncommon, but it is not impossible for a man to die a martyr for an opinion merely out of pride and obstinacy; he may, as St. Paul intimates, 1 Corinthians xiii. 3. "give his body to be burned," and after all, for want of the right principle of love to  
 God

God, derive no saving benefit from his sufferings. ' Even the blessedness of martyrs,' says a pious writer, ' lies not so much in their sufferings for Christ, as their dying in covenant relation to him; and where is the saint that does not find this life, a warfare, a painful and wearisome estate? So that when he dies in Christ he rests from his labours, and his works follow him.'

We will now inquire, secondly, into the state and character of the persons to whom the words of our text relate—" The dead which die in the Lord." When the children of men return again to their dust, we consider them as lost to this world, and as having no longer a portion in any thing that is done under the sun. And so much are we in general engrossed by the things of the present life, and so faint are the impressions of eternity upon our minds, that we are apt to forget that blessed hope of everlasting life which is given us by Jesus Christ, and frequently sorrow for our departed friends, as for those that have no hope. But, my brethren, there is a world of spirits beyond this region of matter; a world of infinite and inconceivable felicity and glory, where the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, live in his presence, and rejoice and triumph in his favour.

They were once dead in a two-fold sense, and the subjects of spiritual as well as natural death: " They " were dead in trespasses and sins." Eph. ii. 1. deprived of that moral image of God, in which the human soul was originally created, and utterly destitute of all those pious and devout affections towards God, which is the life and happiness of a rational and immortal being.

Thus

Thus fallen from their innocence and integrity, they were the necessary objects of the divine displeasure, and exposed to death as the just punishment of their apostacy and disobedience. The sentence of the law stood out against them, and had they been removed out of this world, before the tremendous sentence was reversed, not only temporal death, but eternal perdition would have been their certain and inevitable portion. This the all-wise God clearly foresaw, and in his eternal purpose he fore-ordained deliverance for them: He entered into covenant with his only begotten Son on their behalf, and with his intire acquiescence, engaged to clothe him with human flesh, and at an appointed period, to send him into this miserable world in the important character of a Redeemer.—Hence, as St. Paul writes, Gal. iv. 4, 5. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.”—And as it was absolutely necessary, according to the divine constitution, that he who redeemed sinners from that punishment which the law had denounced upon them, should himself suffer the punishment which was so denounced; the eternal Son of God, sustained, voluntarily sustained in his own body, that curse which their transgressions had entailed upon them. He was even made (as the same Apostle expresses it, ch. iii. 13.) “a curse for us;” and “suffered for sins,” (as St. Peter testifies, 1st epistle, ch. iii. 18.) “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God.”—He died that we might live; and by the shedding of his most precious blood, obtained  
eternal



eternal redemption for all them that should believe in, and obey him.

Thus the blessed Jesus redeemed his people from the prevalence of spiritual death, and from the punishment of eternal condemnation, and left them nothing but the endurance of a temporal dissolution, which, notwithstanding all its natural terrors, he has converted into a blessing, and made it the established method of their admission into a better and a happier state, where being "absent from the body, they are "present with the Lord." 2 Cor. v. 8. Such are the dead of whom our text speaks as dying in the Lord.

Let us now more particularly consider the import of the expression. To die in the Lord, then, is to die in a state of union to Jesus Christ, who is confessedly the person spoken of in our text, and they who die in him, are previously united to him, and made one with him. They have received his spirit, and through that divine influence they have been incorporated into Christ's mystical body, and made as really a part of him, as the members are parts of the natural body, and derive life from their union with the head. They are, as the Apostle expresses it, Eph. v. 30. "Members of his body, of his flesh, and "of his bones," and are sustained by a life which he imparts to their souls, and by which immortal blessedness is secured to them. Even their bodies, their vile bodies, or the bodies of their humiliation, are closely united to him, and are therefore committed to the ground by their surviving friends, 'Earth to earth, 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain 'hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through



“ our Lord Jesus Christ.” “ For (as St. Paul writes “ to the Theſſalonians, 1 epistle, ch. iv. ver. 14.) if “ we believe that Jesus died, and rose again; even so “ them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with “ him.” But as all that die do not die in the Lord, but only those that have been previously united to him, and made one spirit with him, it becomes necessary for us to inquire, whether this union with the Son of God hath taken place in us : For undoubtedly, brethren, the scriptures speak much on this point ; and the very strong terms in which they express it, are intended to convince us, that to be in the Lord, to be united to him, to live in him, and to die in him, mean something more than receiving the initiatory rite of baptism, and calling ourselves by the name of Christians. Indeed, if words have any determinate meaning, they can mean nothing less than a spiritual living principle within us, enabling us to surmount the corrupt desires and inclinations of our nature, and to live such a life as is consistent with the precepts of the gospel, and congenial with the temper and spirit of its divine and glorious Author.

But then, as the principle which produces such a conduct must arise from a thorough conviction of the truth of the gospel, I would observe further, that to die in the Lord, is to die in the profession of the faith of the gospel ; “ the faith (as St. Jude calls “ it, ver. 3.) which was once delivered unto the “ saints.” This is a very comprehensive expression, including in it the whole revealed will of God ; all the doctrines which are to be believed, and all the duties which are to be practised, in order to our salvation.

vation. The doctrines of the gospel are those grand and important truths which respect the real and essential Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his absolute equality with the eternal Jehovah in every divine attribute and perfection; the sufficiency of his sacrifice, as an atonement for the sins of men, and the completeness of his obedience as the ground of our title to eternal life, on believing in him. The divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit, as that powerful agent, to whom is committed the arduous work of convincing men of their sins, and bringing them to believe in Jesus that they may obtain forgiveness of their sins, be sanctified, and saved.

These are the grand and important truths, which, as Christians, we are required to believe, and which, as sinners, are so absolutely necessary to our salvation, that our denying or disregarding them will infallibly expose us to God's fierce wrath and everlasting displeasure; since the scriptures uniformly declare, "there is salvation in no other, neither is there any other name under heaven given amongst men, whereby we must be saved, but only the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." And, "whilst he that believeth on the Son of God, hath everlasting life: he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him." Acts iv. 12. and John iii. 36. The word faith, therefore, is made use of in the scriptures, to denote the whole body of Christian theology, it is also used to express our assent and consent to the doctrines of Christianity, and that particular application of them to ourselves, by which, as individuals, we become interested in

that Redeemer who is the grand object of our faith, and in all those invaluable blessings which he purchased for us by his death and passion. Hence we are said to be justified by faith, to be saved by faith, to be sanctified by faith; and St. Paul declares, in his own, and in the name of every real Christian: "The life  
 " which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the  
 " Son of God, who loved me, and who gave him-  
 " self for me." Gal. ii. 20.

This is the confession, and profession, of a real Christian, "for (saith the same Apostle, Rom. x. 10.)  
 " with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,  
 " and with the mouth confession is made unto sal-  
 " vation." In this profession real Christians live; and in this profession they also die; and therefore, it is said of the old testament believers, "that they  
 " all died in faith." Indeed, faith is the last grace acted by a dying saint, it is the anchor of his soul, its support and consolation in the solemn prospect of eternity: "He knows whom he has believed, and  
 " is persuaded that he is able to keep that which he  
 " hath committed to him against that day"—he confides alone in the atonement and righteousness of his Redeemer—he bears up himself on the covenant of grace, and renouncing all works and duties of his own, he believes the record which God hath given of his Son, and professes, with the great Apostle, (1 Tim. i. 15.) "This is a faithful saying, and wor-  
 " thy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into  
 " the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." And the man who thus dies professing faith in the Son of God, dies in the Lord.

To

To die in the Lord, is, moreover, to die in obedience to him who is Lord both of the dead and of the living, and in meek submission to his sovereign will. Death indeed is man's inevitable destiny : " By one man " (says the scripture, Rom. v. 12.) sin entered into " the world, and death by sin : and so death passed " upon all men, for that all have sinned." This is the judgment of God upon the whole human race, and none can possibly escape it. But then, whilst all men are forced to yield to the stroke of this universal conqueror, believers in Jesus are the only persons that can leave the world without reluctance ; not only willing to die, because it is the will of God they should die, but in the exercise of faith, hope, and charity, even desiring to depart that they may be with Christ, and rejoicing in hope of that glory which shall speedily be revealed and accomplished in them.

A believer on a sick and dying bed is frequently, with the Apostle, in a strait betwixt two, " having a " desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which for " himself is far better ;" though to abide in the flesh may be more needful for his friends and relatives, and in some cases for the church of God, and the interests of his gospel ; but as to himself, he can say with good old Simeon, after he had beheld the Lord Christ, and embraced the Incarnate Redeemer, " Lord " now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word ; for mine eyes have seen thy " salvation." Luke ii. 29, 30.

The sight of Jesus Christ by faith, which is that to the soul, which the eye is to the body, has a wonderful effect upon the believer. It deadens his affections to the



the present world, and draws his heart towards heaven. In the midst of all his bodily pains and infirmities, during his restless days and sleepless nights, he frequently looks forward to the celestial mansions, and like a fatigued and weather-beaten traveller, he longs to be at home: For heaven is the Christian's home, his rest and his inheritance——

“ There his best friends, his kindred dwell,

“ There God his Saviour reigns.”

Jesus has prayed in his behalf, John xvii. 24. “ Father, I will, that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory;” and with this will of his Saviour he perfectly coincides; he dies not merely because he cannot live, but because his Lord would have him die, and the hour is now arrived when all the gracious purposes of God concerning him, are about to have their full accomplishment.

Death, indeed, has a sting, and because the believer, though renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, is still a sinner, he feels this sting, and by a deep sense of his manifold infirmities, he is sometimes discouraged, yet, considering that, by the dying of the Lord Jesus, sin is abolished, and the sting of death taken away, he rises superior to all his fears, and thanks God for giving him “ the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” To him it is a matter of unspeakable joy and everlasting triumph, that his Saviour hath tasted death for the human race; and when reflecting on all the bitter circumstances of the death of Jesus, he sees what those graces are which a Christian ought to exercise when he is passing out of this



this world ; and as he has laboured to imitate him in his life, so now he desires to be conformed to him in his death ; calling upon God, and committing his departing soul to him, in the confidence of faith, in the full assurance of hope, with all the expressions of the most fervent love, and the profoundest submission to his sovereign will: “ If this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done ” — “ Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit : ” Bless my friends, forgive mine enemies, grant them repentance, and let us all be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting. “ Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : Yea, faith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”

We have considered the occasion of the words, and have enquired into the state and character of the persons to whom they relate. We will now proceed thirdly, to shew the nature of that blessedness which is pronounced on them. “ Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.” Is it asked, why they are blessed, or in what their blessedness consists? Our text affords a most satisfactory and comfortable answer: “ They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”

The word translated labours, is used to express the variety of tribulations, calamities, and crosses, under which, in this present life, the saints of God do groan, being burdened. It is the declaration of holy writ, “ that man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.” Pain and disease, disappointment and perplexity, distress and sorrow of different kinds,  
and

and from various causes, are the natural and unavoidable allotments of mankind. Sin hath introduced these evils into the world, and not even the most faithful servants of God are exempted from them: So far from it, that in general they are the most afflicted, as their feelings and sensibilities are keener than those of other people, and their habits of thoughtfulness and reflection have a tendency to make them feel more sensibly than those persons usually do, who live in a state of inconsideration, and strive to divest themselves of every painful reflection, by vain conversation, and dissipating amusements.

The saints of God have been always among the sufferers; and besides the common and unavoidable evils of human life, their being saints has considerably augmented their sufferings, as far, I mean, as one man suffers from another, by enmity and malevolence, by opposition and ill treatment. Indeed, their Lord himself hath informed them that it would be so: "If," says he, "ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." John xv. 19. This was remarkably verified in the Apostles, and first professors of christianity, and real Christians even in our day, are not exempted from the opposition and enmity of the ungodly; their path is still the path of suffering, and "through much tribulation they enter into the kingdom of God." But oh, how bright and glorious are their prospects there, for "there the wicked cease from troubling," there they "rest from their labours;" from pain and disease,  
from

from poverty and distress, from all the evils of this mortal state, and what is more than all, they rest from the being and indwelling of sin !

Sin is natural to man, and even in the regenerate, its infection still remains, and will remain till the body of sin and death, as St. Paul calls it, sinks into the grave, never to rise again, but with death itself to be utterly abolished. Here, indeed, they are daily groaning for deliverance from their burden, and crying out with the Apostle, " O wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us ? " It is true, they both expect deliverance; and know who their deliverer is; already Jesus Christ hath so delivered them, that sin hath not the dominion over them, nor doth it reign in their mortal bodies; still their complete deliverance is reserved for another state, where they shall never think a vain thought, nor speak an idle word; but be freed from all possibility of sinning, and attain to perfect and unspotted holiness.

They that die in the Lord are blessed, as they rest for ever from the temptations of Satan. Common and fashionable as it may be in this age of infidelity, to ridicule the very idea of evil spirits, and to deny all kinds of spiritual influence on the human soul, true believers are constrained to adopt the opposite sentiment; for whilst they know that there is a Holy Ghost which sanctifies all the elect people of God, and have an humble hope that they themselves are not wholly destitute of his divine and sacred influences, they know also to their grief and sorrow, that there is a spirit of a very different quality, " the spirit which

C

" now

“ now worketh in the children of disobedience,” and from whose assaults even the children of God are not exempted. St. Paul, when recommending it to Christians, Ephesians vi. 11. “ To put on the whole armour of God, that they might be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,” gives, in the succeeding verse, a very strong description of the nature, the variety, and the number of evil spirits. “ We wrestle not” (says he) “ against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Ver. 12.

Such are the forces combined against the faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ, by satan their grand adversary, to oppose and resist them as they are fighting the good fight of faith, “ and to prevent them (if it were possible) from laying hold on eternal life.” And how fierce and formidable this opposition is, with what art and industry it is carried on; and how long it continues, you, brethren, that are not ignorant of satan’s devices, can well tell. But thanks be to God, believers, your conflicts, with your grand adversary, will one day be at an end. He may persecute you even unto death, and pursue you to the very gates of the new Jerusalem; but he cannot advance a step farther, for dying in the Lord, you will be instantly delivered from his rage and malice, and not a single arrow from his infernal quiver shall ever reach the battlements of heaven, but you shall join in that loud voice which John heard, Rev. xii. 10. “ Now is come salvation and strength, and the  
“ kingdom



“ kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ,  
 “ for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which  
 “ accused them before our God day and night.”

The dead in the Lord are blessed, as they enjoy everlasting rest and satisfaction in the clear vision, and in the full fruition of the ever blessed God, and their Redeemer Jesus Christ! This is a very glorious part of our subject, and it is indeed the grand ultimatum of the blessedness of true believers! But alas, how little are we able at present to say concerning it, when an inspired Apostle himself hath declared, “ Eye hath  
 “ not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into  
 “ the heart of man to conceive what God hath pre-  
 “ pared for them that love him.” But although we can say but little upon the future blessedness of believers, yet as God by his Spirit hath revealed something of it in the Scriptures, we are authorized to meditate upon them, and to conceive as far as our limited powers will admit of a subject, which as to the full and perfect understanding of it, is at present inconceivable. And here two passages represent themselves to my mind, with which I will close this part of their blessedness who die in the Lord. 1 Epistle John iii. 1, 2. “ Behold, what manner of love the  
 “ Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be  
 “ called the Sons of God: therefore the world know-  
 “ eth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now  
 “ are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear  
 “ what we shall be: but we know, that when he shall  
 “ appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him  
 “ as he is.”—Rev. xxii. v. 3, 4 and 5. “ And there  
 “ shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and



“ of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall  
 “ serve him. And they shall see his face; and his  
 “ name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall  
 “ be no night there, and they need no candle, neither  
 “ light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them  
 “ light: and they shall reign for ever.”

It is added in our text, “ And their works do follow  
 “ them.” Believers in Jesus are always careful to  
 maintain good works. God hath before ordained that  
 they should walk in them, as St. Paul affirms, Eph.  
 ii. 10; and with this ordination of God they heartily  
 concur. Their obedience therefore is not constrained  
 and partial, but free and universal. They love God,  
 and their love to him makes them keep his command-  
 ments, even those that are the most difficult, and that  
 bear the hardest upon the natural pride, sensuality and  
 selfishness of the human heart. The grace of God  
 inwardly and effectually teacheth them, as the Apostle  
 observes, Titus ii; v. 11 to 15, “ to deny ungodliness  
 “ and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and  
 “ godly, in this present world: looking for that bles-  
 “ sed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great  
 “ God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ: who gave him-  
 “ self for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity,  
 “ and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous  
 “ of good works.”

Amongst these works, we must doubtless include  
 acts of charity and benevolence, which are so essential  
 to the character of a true believer, and so necessary to  
 ascertain our right and title to an interest in Christ,  
 that in the solemn representation of the last day, given  
 in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, our Lord  
 has

has made them the grand criterion, by which men's characters will be tried, and their states decided.

But here, brethren, it is of the utmost consequence for us to remember, that although, works of justice, mercy and charity, are essential to the character of real Christians, and there is no such thing as being accepted of our Judge at the last great day, if we have been habitually unjust, implacable and unmerciful; still, that the very best of our works, do not constitute a right and title to eternal life, but are only to be considered as the evidences of our having obtained it, by the faith of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is the doctrine of scripture, and it is also the doctrine of our own church, as contained in her articles, homilies and liturgy. ' We are accounted righteous before God (say our venerable reformers) only  
' for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,  
' by faith, and not for our own works or deservings;  
' and though good works which are the fruits of faith,  
' and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins  
' and endure the severity of God's judgment, yet are  
' they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do  
' spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, in-  
' somuch that by them a lively faith may be as evi-  
' dently known, as a tree discerned by the fruit.\* They  
are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification;  
agreeably with what is said in our text of them who  
die in the Lord, that their works do follow them; and  
according to that well known observation of St. Au-  
gustine, ' Good works do not go before to justify, but  
' they

\* See Articles 11th and 12th.

“ they follow those who are justified.” This is a very important and necessary distinction, and it deserves to be regarded with the most careful attention, since mere morality will never carry any man to heaven; and there can be no obedience which God will accept, but that which is founded on a cordial belief of the grand doctrines of the Gospel, and flows from a principle of grateful love to it’s divine and glorious Author. Ask those distinguished personages, who are described, Rev. vii. 13, 14, as arrayed with white robes and palms in their hands, how they attained the dignity and the felicity of the heavenly world, and you will find that though they came out of great tribulation, and many of them even laid down their lives, as martyrs for the truth, yet that this was not their passport for heaven; but that “ they washed their robes, and made them “ white in the blood of the Lamb:” They were conscious of their own impurity and imperfection in the sight of that great Being, “ who chargeth the Angels “ with folly, and with whom the heavens are not “ clean;” and under this conviction they renounced their own righteousness, and confided alone in the merits of their Redeemer. “ Therefore (it is added) “ are they before the throne of God, and serve him “ day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on “ the throne shall dwell among them. They shall “ hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither “ shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the “ Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall “ feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains “ of waters: and God shall wipe all tears from their “ eyes.” Ver. 15, 16, 17.

What

What a delightful illustration is this of the words of our text, " Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth : Yea, saith the Spirit, that " they may rest from their labours, and their works " do follow them." And how well may each of us, with equal importunity, but I trust with greater sincerity, and better success, take up that request of Balaam, " Let me die the death of the righteous, and " let my last end be like his."

I have now, brethren, only to apologize for the very weak and imperfect manner in which, through want of time, and a closer attention than could be paid to it, during the intervals of a long journey, I have been forced to address you on this important subject: And to entreat your kind and patient attention to a short improvement of what has been said, with a reference to that person, at whose request, and through the obliging permission of your Minister, I have this day spoken to you. It was not, I am thoroughly persuaded, with any view of being complimented after his death, that my deceased friend devolved this service upon me; he was too wise and too good a man to indulge such a wish, and if he had, no one could be found less disposed to gratify it than myself. His view was of a higher, nobler nature; for having very closely examined the sentiments which have now been proposed to you, and found by an experience of several years, how admirably calculated they were to answer all the great ends and purposes of religion, he wished to bear his dying testimony to them, in hopes that others, being prevailed upon to examine them as he had done, might also prove their divine and powerful efficacy, and find them their support through  
life,



life, their comfort in the hour of death, and their joy and triumph during the countless ages of eternity.

Many of you, brethren, knew our deceased friend much longer than myself. But from what I have seen in him, I verily believe, that there is in your breasts, a testimony for him, and in favor of his religious sentiments, that he was an honest and an upright man, one that feared God, and wrought righteousness; one that loved his fellow creatures, and was disposed to do good unto all men, especially them that were of the household of faith; that he was a man of open and liberal sentiments, not blindly attached to a party or an opinion, but that could say with the Apostle, " Grace be with all them that love " our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. " A sinner he knew he was, and to the last period of his life, he humbly and penitently confessed it, deriving all his hopes of forgiveness from the redemption of the Son of God, and " making mention of his righteousness, " even of his only. "

For several months previous to his dissolution, he had that solemn event continually in view; and though he willingly concurred in every measure that was recommended for the restoration of his health, and the prolongation of his life, he did it with the fortitude of a man, and with the dignity of a Christian, neither unwilling to live, nor afraid to die. When his infirmities grew upon him, and the hopes of his recovery vanished, his faith seemed daily to increase, and his desires after a better world were divinely strengthened. He lamented indeed his unworthiness and unprofitableness, but he gloried in the all-sufficiency of his Saviour's merits, and frequently conversed



versed on his delightful subject of the cross of Christ, in a manner, and with an emphasis, that greatly affected, and, I hope, edified myself and others. Indeed, I have often found the salutary effects of his conversation, and the wisdom of his remarks on religion, and on the professors of it, in the discharge of my ministry; and I hesitate not in saying, that much might be learned from him by people of far greater wisdom and piety than I dare pretend to.

I could say much more, but he needs it not: For having died in the Lord, he is blessed with the Lord; he rests from his labours, and his works follow him. Him we will therefore leave till the resurrection of the just, when that body we have now committed to the dust shall arise all fair and beautiful, and be fashioned like unto the glorious body of Jesus Christ: "It is sown in corruption, but it will be raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, but it will be raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, but it will be raised in power." 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43.

My brethren, we have all professed, this morning, that we are looking for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. But let us seriously inquire, whether we are looking for these great events as real Christians look for them, or whether the words have been uttered by us as matters of course, without thought, without meaning, without self-examination, as to the grounds on which we look for, and expect such things!

Religion, in order to its being acceptable, to that God, whom it principally respects, and profitable to ourselves, must be a reasonable service. We must

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examine

examine well its grounds, we must observe the effects it produces in us. Christianity, real genuine Christianity, is far, very far remote from superstition and enthusiasm. It has much to do with the heart, and with the affections; but then it is addressed also to the understandings of men: it courts our investigation, and we cannot be too well certified of the truth of those things wherein we have been instructed.

What is it, my brethren, that gives the Christian religion so vast a superiority over all other religions? Surely it is not merely because it proposes a purer system of morals, and confirms the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments. Is it not rather because it reveals a method of salvation worthy of God, and suitable for man? Is it not because it shews how God can be just, and yet justify sinners; assert the honour of his law, and satisfy his justice, and at the same time shew mercy to those who have violated the one and incensed the other against themselves?

This is the grand distinguishing doctrine of the gospel, Jesus Christ delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. But do we believe it? Do we act as if we believed it? Do we know the efficacy of the cross of Christ to convert sinners from the error of their ways, to make them new creatures, to take them out of the temper and spirit of a wicked world, and by causing them to live unto the Lord, to prepare them for the blessedness of dying in him? These are the effects produced by real Christianity on all who truly believe it, and these are the privileges which are inseparably connected with them: "They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

But,

But, my brethren, if they who die in the Lord are thus blessed, what will be their condition who do not die in the Lord, but leave the world, as too many do leave it, ignorant of who he is, and of what he has done for the salvation of sinners, enemies and opposers of his glorious gospel, and utterly averse to that strict and holy life, which it requires of its professors? What will become of those who have had none of the labours of real Christians to rest from;—no works to follow them into the other world, but the works of sin, such works as are practised all around us, and sometimes by those who occasionally, and even constantly attend the public worship of God? What will become of those who curse and swear, and take the name of God in vain, who accustom themselves to filthiness and foolish talking and jestings which are not convenient; who are in the habit of breaking the Sabbath themselves, and take no care of the religious instruction of their families? What will become of those who are lewd, intemperate, proud, wrathful, and revengeful, who spend a great part of their time in following the most vain and frivolous, and even the most pernicious amusements; who make this world their great object, and know no higher enjoyment than either in amassing wealth, or else in consuming it on their lusts and pleasures? What will become of those who profess to know God, but in works deny him, being disobedient, and to every good work reprobate? If we are acquainted with the scriptures, we know what the end of these men will be, and if we believe the scriptures, we cannot do otherwise than tremble, when we hear such a declaration as that. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9. “The  
“ Lord

“ Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with  
 “ his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking ven-  
 “ geance on them that know not God, and that obey  
 “ not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall  
 “ be punished with everlasting destruction from the  
 “ presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his  
 “ power.”

My brethren, it is highly necessary for us to take especial notice of the character of the persons against whom this dreadful punishment is threatened: They are such as know not God, and are disobedient to the gospel of his Son; and their disobedience respects both the doctrines which the gospel teaches, and also the precepts which the gospel enforces; they are too proud to believe the one, and too sensual to obey the other: For the gospel, at the same time that it humbles the pride of man, and destroys every idea of his own moral excellency, is also a most powerful restraint upon his sensuality, and gives such a check to the gratification of his passions, as to the generality of men is altogether intolerable. Hence they continue in a state of wilful disobedience to the gospel, and obstinately refuse submission to the yoke of Christ. But be assured, brethren, upon the highest and the most sacred authority, you must either submit or perish everlastingly. There is no other alternative, if those awful words of Jesus Christ himself are regarded, John iii. 36. “ He  
 “ that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and  
 “ he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but  
 “ the wrath of God abideth on him.”

*E I N I S.*